DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 194 449 SP 016 187

AUTHOR Atkinson, Anna Pearl
TITLE The Unfinished Revolution: General Curriculum and Standardized Testing.
PUB DATE Jun 80
NOTE 19p.: Paper presented at the National Invitational Conference on Problems, Issues, Plans and Strategies Related to the Preparation and Survival of Black Public School Teachers (Norfolk, VA, June 26-27, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Colleges: *Black Education; *Black Teachers: *Culture Fair Tests; Equal Education; Equal Opportunities (Jobs); Higher Education; Labor Market; *Minimum Competency Testing; *Standardized Tests; Teacher Education; *Test Bias; Test Wiseness

ABSTRACT

Equal educational opportunity is the springboard for equal opportunity and is the hope of blacks, other minorities, and whites for fair participation in the economic marketplace. Standardized tests frequently contain a cultural bias that mitigates against black students, thus presenting a barrier to higher education. In many places, competency testing programs are being implemented without enough attention to how well the tests match the goals and curriculum of schooling, and little consideration has been given to how instruction should be organized to help students who do poorly on the tests. Efforts are being made to regulate standardized testing, many of which have taken the form of legislative proposals. Students of standardized testing often distinguish among several social functions tests may serve: for example, selection, placement, assessment, and guidance. While competency testing is a controversial topic, it is vitally important that in the area of teacher education it should be used to screen out inept and undertrained potential teachers. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

M. Butler
"ERIC Input"

ED194448

Unpaged
169

THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION: GENERAL CURRICULUM AND STANDARDIZED TESTING

by

Anna Pearl Atkinson
Professor, Special Education Department
School of Education
Atlanta University
Atlanta, Georgia

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Anna P. Atkinson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

For presentation and dialogue at the National Invitational Conference on Problems, Issues, Plans and Strategies Related to the Preparation and Survival of Black Public School Teachers at Norfolk State University, Norfolk, Virginia, June 26-27, 1980.

AN EMINENT SCHOLARS PROGRAM

SP 016 187

THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION: GENERAL CURRICULUM AND STANDARDIZED TESTING

Leadership in achieving equal educational opportunity is expected from institutions of higher education since, historically, direction for organization, administration and instructional strategies in elementary and secondary education have come from colleges and universities. However, the role that higher education might take to facilitate the reduction of the conflicts in general curriculum and standardized testing at the elementary and secondary levels is lessened by the unresolved issues remaining in higher education itself.

The schools play a major role in transmitting our culture from generation to generation. The conditions of American society are reflected in its schools. The schools can perpetuate those conditions or, with support, they can reflect the principles of democracy, thus leading the way and setting the pattern for society.

Equal educational opportunity is the spring board for equal opportunity in the real world, and is the hope of blacks, other minorities and whites for fair participation in the economic market-place. Equal educational opportunity is also a necessary prerequisite to the mutual respect and understanding among divers groups on which the success and stability of American society depends. (Position Statement on Desegregation, 1978, p. 2).

THE ISSUES: GENERAL CURRICULUM

The general trend over the last 35 years has been for more Americans to attend school and to stay in school for longer periods of time. But the increase in educational attainment and enrollment in higher education has been more outstanding for blacks than for whites. Between 1969 and 1974, the number of nonwhites, aged 25-29, with a high school education increased by almost 33 percent; the increase among the same group of whites was closer to 20 percent, or 50 percent lower. In 1968 blacks composed 6.4 percent of college students 16-24 years of age; by 1973 that figure had risen to 8.4 percent, an increase of over 30 percent (Digest of Educational Statistics, HEW, 1974). But as of 1972-73 only 2.7 percent of the doctorates awarded went to black students (HEW, 1974), and it is worthy of note that the majority of these (59 percent) were in one area — education (HEW, 1974).

An important measure of the success of education, particularly higher education, is the extent to which it provides students with future "life chances" (see Jackson, Chapter IV). Both the positive trends in black higher education opportunities and higher dropout rates among blacks must be weighed against this critical postgraduation context: a college degree is becoming less and less of an assurance to employment. Unemployment rates for black college graduates were close to and in one year lower than those of their white counterparts in the late sixties and early seventies, but they are increasing and the gap is widening once more (Condition of Education, 1976, p. 242). In general, minorities suffer from a greater rate of unemployment with or without a college education, and:

> It is ironic but evitable that just as college opportunities are finally within reach of so many new students, the colleges are losing their capacity for social and occupational placement. Because so many have been to college, a college education is now a necessary but no-longer sufficient condition for social mobility. Not having the degree may block opportunities, but having it will not ensure them. (The Second Newman Report, 1973, p. 18)

Black Colleges and Universities

According to the Office for the Advancement of the Public Negro Colleges, there are 34 historically black public colleges, almost all of which are located in southern or border states. The Directory of Traditionally Black Colleges and Universities (1971) lists a total of 87 traditionally black four-year institutions. A comprehensive overview of enrollment is not easily obtained because some reports include two-year black colleges and others collect data from institutions "predominantly" black as contrasted with "historically" black. But in 1974 the Office for the Advancement of Public Negro Colleges reported that blacks composed 6.7 percent of the total enrollment in higher education, with approximately 24 percent of that figure attending historically black, nonpublic institutions; and 64 percent in historically white institutions (Jones, 1970, p. 7).

Although total enrollment in black colleges have increased there are actual and anticipated decreases for some of these schools. One significant problem is direct competition from predominantly white institutions located in the same city or within easy commuting distance. In almost all of these cases, the black school was there first and the white school duplicates its programs and draws funding from the same source (Fourth Annual Report of the Educational Opportunity Fund, 1972-74, 1975). According to Egerton (1971):

> the prevailing pattern is one of racially separate and unequal higher education.... (None of the schools) rates as a good bet to remain predominantly black but become equal in status, prestige, staffing and funding to its predominantly white sister institutions (p. 15).....Wherever public black colleges exist, they are either facing the loss of black identity through integration or merger, the loss of quality through attrition and neglect. The only alternative they don't have — and never have had — is to be black and equal (p. 29).

The reasons generally agreed upon for the decline in higher education enrollment are: a greatly slowed birth rate; a tightening professional job market combined with sharply increased costs for higher education; a decline in the middle class student's interest in pursuing a B. A. as an entreé to the labor market; the absence of selective service and other national pressures that historically have sent enrollments skyrocketing; and the over-building of industrial plants and staffs in the boom 1960's.

With the declining enrollment in higher education, changing student interests and new curriculum patterns, the liberal arts and humanities curriculums are faced with a particularly severe crisis. Many institutions are currently feeling the effects of huge shifts of students away from the social sciences and humanities and into business and the vocationally oriented departments. A silent war is being waged within academia over how to adjust to these changing patterns and the political pressures for financial economy. (Winn, 1980, p. 686).

THE ISSUES: STANDARDIZED TESTING

The American instructional program is based on the teach, test strategy. However, the increased use of standardized tests by

elementary and secondary schools, colleges and graduates, schools has caused public furor. "Current conflicts over test bias and "truth in testing" reflect differing aims of education and the increasingly important social role of testing in our society. (Haney, 1980, p. 640).

Standardized testing is much in the news. Even more than earlier debates — in the early 1960s, concerning personality tests, and in the 1970s over bias in tests — the current furor over standardized testing has become both highly public and intensely political. Testing is being debated in state legislatures and in the U. S. Congress. It is being covered widely in the popular press and on TV and radio. Federal courts more and more are asked to adjudicate testing controversies. The popular prominence of current debate over testing was perhaps epitomized by the appearance of Ralph Nader on the "Tonight Show" on January 24, 1980, to publicize the recent Nadar report on the Educational Testing Service (ETS). After condemning the "reigh" of ETS, Nader gave an impassioned plea for wider consideration of traits like perseverance, wisdom, idealism, and creativity — traits that cannot be measured by multiple - choice aptitude and achievement tests of the sort ETS publishes. The "Tonight Show" audience broke into spontaneous applause.

The incident symbolized the depth of feelings over standardized testing, but it barely scratched the surface of the myriad concerns and conflicts currently swirling around testing. Should students have to pass minimum competency tests in order to pass each grade or graduate from high school? Should "truth in testing" legislation be passed to guarantee that test-takers have access to corrected test results and to force test sponsors and developers to be more accountable for the

instruments they produce and profit from? Should the role of standardized tests as gatekeepers to educational and occupational opportunities be enhanced or diminished? And whatever their role, how can tests be made more fair, to enhance equality of opportunities for both poor and rich, male and female, black and white, young and old?

Dozens of states around the country have implemented competency testing programs so as to provide a new standard for award of the high school diploma, a guide grade-to-grade promotion, or to identify students for remedial instruction. Though rationalized in several different ways, minimum competency testing programs seem in large measure to represent a worry that all is not well with America's schools, but they may be as much a symptom of the worry as a solution to it. In many places competency testing programs are being implemented without enough attention to how well the tests match the goals and curriculum of schooling and remarkably little consideration has been given to how instruction should be organized to help students who do poorly on the tests. These and other controversies concerning minimum competency testing were addressed most clearly in the federal court case of Debra P. v Turlington in Florida — a case brought before the court on behalf of ten black students and others who were to be denied diplomas after failing Florida's functional literacy test. Data presented during the trial indicated that had the diploma sanction been enforced, 20 percent of black high school seniors in Florida would have been denied diplomas as compared with only 2 percent of white high school seniors. After a trial of several weeks, the federal judge in the case ruled in July 1979 that the Florida testing program was unconstitutional because it

perpetuated the effects of past discrimination and because it was implemented without an adequate phase-in period. As a result, he ordered a moratorium until 1982 on use of the Florida test to deny students a regular high school diploma. The Florida case is now under appeal, but no matter how it is resolved, minimum competency testing at the elementary and secondary level will probably provoke more controversy over the social role of testing.

The "truth in testing" movement is of more recent vintage than the competency testing movement, but it is generating no less debate. It refers loosely to a variety of efforts to regulate standardized testing, many of which have taken the form of legislative proposals to require that: (1) Individual test takers have access to corrected test results within a specified period after test administration; (2) Test sponsors and/or publishers file information on test development, validity, reliability, and cost with government agencies; and (3) Testing agencies give individual test takers information on the nature and intended use of tests prior to testing, and guarantee their right of privacy concerning their own test scores. The common rationale for such proposals is threefold. First, advocates argue that as a matter of simple justice, test-takers should have the opportunity to review the corrected results of tests which have important consequences for their educational and job opportunities — they should know the basis on which they are judged. Second, proponents of truth in testing maintain that test sponsors and publishers should be more accountable for the intellectual quality and social consequences of the test they produce, and that public disclosure will

help bring that about. Third, they argue that the limitations of standardized tests — the fairly wide margin of error implicit in any individual score, the limited validity of test scores to predict things like future educational attainment and job performance, and the fact that test scores typically correlate with measures of social and economic background—should be more widely known, especially to individuals who take the tests.

Students of standardized testing often distinquish among several social functions tests may serve; for example, selection, placement, assessment and guidance, instructional improvement, program evaluation, and accountability functions. The current troubles over testing deal with several of these different roles of tests. The truth in testing legislation is aimed almost exclusively at post secondary selection and the role of IQ tests in selecting our retarded students from the general population of children. Nairn's target, ETS, derives the bulk of its revenues from selection and admissions testing programs (p. 326, 488). Minimum competency testing aims at both placement and improving instruction. More broadly, all of these deal with accountability; with various forms of social accounting by institutions.

ALTERNATIVES

This discussion has focused on the issues involved in the general curriculum and standardized testing controversial. Solutions to the issues will depend upon teacher involvement with professional organizations, parents, students and community agencies which can form

strong lobbies to affect positive changes in curriculum and test development for the future.

Open admissions, free tuition, state scholarships and loan programs are significant efforts to meet the unfinished revolution. Other services which could have direct impact on equal educational opportunity for Blacks are:

- Counseling services which provide assistance in making college and career choices. These are particularly helpful for high school freshmen and sophomores and are provided by both higher education institutions and independent agents.
- More extensive programs, such as College Bound, which target support to minority students throughout high school, as well as assisting them in making an appropriate college choice. These may be provided by or in cooperation with colleges and universities which then admit and offer financial assistance to successful program graudates.
- Expanded outreach programs, such as Antioch's conducted by colleges and universities, to recruit students "who normally would not seek college as a means for realizing their potential" (Graham, 1963-67, p. 6).
- Cooperative programs between high schools and community colleges which would expose minority students to the college experience. These could range from an option to substitute a year at the college for the 12th grade, if basic state requirements had been completed, to an option to elect certain courses on the community college campus. An important variation on this theme would be a high school equivalency program available at the college to older students who had either dropped out or been pushed out of high school.

THE FUTURE

The effect of the educational changes of the seventies on Black teachers was momentous. It was a period when more than 200,000 teachers in the south and border states lost their jobs. It was the period when minimum National Teacher Examination scores were required

for teacher certification and as a basis for salary. It was the period of declining student enrollment. It was the decade of the educational revolution for Black teachers.

This unfinished revolution continues as America moves into the eighties. U. S. Labor Department economists predict that nearly 16 million jobs will be created in the 1980s. That means there will be six jobs for every five that now exist. About half of them will be in white-collar occupations.

While there will be growth in the number of professional jobs, it won't be in all categories. Declining birth rates have decreased the demand for teachers, and as the "baby bust" generation works its way through college, the demand for college faculty will also lessen. Some demographers predict that birth rates will rise by the mid to late eighties, so the demand for educators could increase later on. Still, except for a brisk increase in the number of preschool and adult-education opportunities, the overall demand for educators will be weaker in this decade than it has ever been.

On the other hand, the demand for engineers should rise rapidly, especially in energy related industries. An increased need for medical care calls for more physicians, dentists and other health professionals; support staff is expected to grow rapidly. The outlook for nurses is bright, especially since the number of nurse-practitioner programs have increased in schools and hospitals. Opportunities for nurses will be greatest in the South and in inner cities.

In general, the need for other professionals (including lawyers, physical and social scientists, labor relations personnel and social

workers) will also be up in the 1980s. Jobs openings are expected to increase by more than 20 percent between 1980 and 1985 in Alaska, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada but by only three percent in Rhode Island and New York. Job growth will be lower in California, Pennsylvania and Illinois than in Florida, South Carolina and Texas.

The need for managers, except for those who are self-employed, will increase in the 1980s, but will vary by industry. Bank management and health administration jobs will increase at the fastest rates, while growth in the numbers of educational administrators will be sluggish.

The picture in crafts is mixed. While decline in employment is expected for cabinet makers, jewelers and some heavy equipment machinists, the demand for construction workers and computer and machine repairers should increase sharply. Opportunities in crafts jobs are often ideal because of the high hourly wages after training is completed and the excellent benefits negotiated by unions. Since both the Labor Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission note the underrepresentation of Black women in these jobs, unions will be obliged to alter their recruitment method to attract more women. (In fact, in the fall of 1979, Labor Secretary Ray Marshall appointed a committee to monitor the increase Blacks in construction jobs.) while craft jobs have rich opportunities, the occupational segregation experienced by Blacks and women make some of them reluctant to enter the trade.

Clerical jobs will increase dramatically. Many will involve the handling of equipment, especially computers. Thus, the need for file clerks and stenographers will decline, while opportunities for word-processing specialists, bank tellers, bookkeepers, secretaries and typists will improve.

Seven rapidly evolving technologies that will change American life have been identified by Westinghouse Electric Corp. researchers, who say the developments will help solve the nation's productivity and energy supply problems. The seven are:

1. Lasers. These devices produce intense beams of light that can cut steel sheets, weld metal, and perform delicate eye surgery. Experts predict that lasers may be used to harden metal, read video disks, and cut the cost of separating uranium 235 in the nuclear fuel enrichment process.

2. Optics. By using fiber optics — light passing through hair-like glass strands — telephone calls and other data can be transmitted farther, with less power, and through a smaller carrier than is possible with conventional methods. One thousandth of a watt of laser light can carry one million simultaneous telephone conversations. The technology will also greatly enhance information collection and processing.

3. Microprocessors. These computers on a chip of silicon are the nucleus of minicomputers which can process, store, retrieve, and communicate millions of pieces of information. In industry, microprocessors will be used to control assembly-line robots, run energy conserving electric motors, and operate the elevators and heating, cooling, and security systems of buildings.

4. Robotics. With microprocessors for brains and lasers for tools, robots are entering factories and performing jobs that are hot, heavy, hazardous, and monotonous.

5. Solar Photovoltaics. The direct conversion of sunlight into electricity has long been used to power earth satellites, but at high cost. Growth in world-wide uses may bring down production costs, Westinghouse says.

6. Coal Conversion. "Probably the key conversion technique to be developed in the 1980s," says Westinghouse. Gas produced from coal can be used in a combined gas, steam, and electric turbine generating plant with high efficiency and low cost — and without polluting the atmosphere. The gas can also be converted into liquid fuels.

7. Fuel Cells. The cells, which produce electricity through electrochemistry, will be demonstrated in prototype by 1985, according to Westinghouse scientists. Efficient, nonpolluting fuel cells could eventually supply both electrical power and heat for neighborhoods, shopping centers, and apartments.

These predictions point out the need for a general curriculum that will train people for the types of jobs which will be available for the 80's and 90's. The general curriculum must also include the development of test taking and skills. This skill will help Black teachers and students to improve their test scores significantly on standardized tests.

7. Fuel Cells. The cells, which produce electricity through electrochemistry, will be demonstrated in prototype by 1985, according to Westinghouse scientists. Efficient, nonpolluting fuel cells could eventually supply both electrical power and heat for neighborhoods, shopping centers, and apartments.

These predictions point out the need for a general curriculum that will train people for the types of jobs which will be available for the 80's and 90's. The general curriculum must also include the development of test taking and skills. This skill will help Black teachers and students to improve their test scores significantly on standardized tests.

SUMMARY

The tangle of teaching troubles is too complex to be easily unraveled. But one problem whose solution seems fairly straightforward is the matter of illiterate and uninformed teachers. Competency tests can and should — be administered to screen out teachers, old as well as novice, who lack basic skills. Such screening would benefit pupils, but it would also put pressure on colleges to flunk substandard students bound for a career in teaching. Indiana University Education Professor David Clark asks rhetorically: "Is it more important to make it easy for kids to reach professional level, or to have good teachers?" Pressure is also needed to ensure adequate funding for teacher training. As a typical example, at the University of Alabama last year total instructional cost for a student in a teacher-ed program was $648, in contrast to $2,304 for an engineering student.

In a classic 1960s study titled The Miseducation of American Teachers, James D. Koerner, now program officer at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, called for the opening of new paths to careers in teaching. At present a state certificate is required for public school teachers, who earn it by completing practice teaching and specialized education courses (such as philosophy of education and educational psychology). According to Koerner there is little evidence that this program of study improves teacher performance. Koerner calls for more intellectually demanding but more flexible requirements to make the field more attractive to talented people who lack specialized teaching credentials. A small step in this direction is a three-year-old pilot program run by

the school board in Hanover, N. H. There, college graduates who want to teach are carefully screened for such qualities as imagination and love of children, as well as academic competency. After a year of probationary teaching, chosen candidates become certified teachers.

Dr. W. E. B. DuBois vividly described the current feelings of Blacks in his autobiography; He wrote:

> One feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving, two warring ideals in one dark body.....The history of the American Negro is the history of this stife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self .... He would not Africanize America for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach the Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both Black and an American, without being cursed and spit upon ....

In order to comprehend this dichotomy one must try to visualize the impact of oppression, segregation, and the American creed in creating ambivalent loyalties toward one's self, race and nation. Black American are a part of cultures, and two educational systems that perpetuated a whirlpool of social entanglement and inner psychological paradox. But we must actively become involved in curriculum planning and test developing for the future.

Lir Lucia F. Atkinson
Atlanta University

REFERENCES

The Condition of Education (1976 ed.) (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1976).

W. E. B. DuBois, Autobiography, (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta University Press, 1942).

J. Egerton, Black Public Colleges: Integration and Disintergration: A Report (Nashville, Tenn: Race Relations Information Center, 1971, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED052286).

Fourth Annual Report of the Educational Opportunity Fund 1972-74 (Trenton N.J.: New Jersey State Department of Higher Education, 1974 ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED096897).

W. Haney, "Trouble Over Testing, Educational Leadership (Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1980).

Health; Education and Welfare, Digest of Educational Statistics (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Printing Office, 1976).

D. Huenecke, "The Higher Education System and Public School Isolation", Toward Reducing Isolation: Prospects for Progress (Atlanta, Ga.: Georgia State University, 1978).

National Task Force on Desegregation Strategies, "Position Statement on Desegregation" (New Orleans, Louisiana: Education Commission of the States, 1978).

I. J. Winn, "Turning the Screw: Higher Education in the 1980's and 1990's". Kappan (Bloomington, In.: Phi Delta Kappa, Inc., June, 1980).

E. Wynne, "The College Testing Controversy," Wall Street Journal (February 14, 1980).